

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to you regarding the state of drought in the United States (U.S.) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (Department) plan for distribution of funds as appropriated in Public Law 117-328. **We urge you to swiftly develop a plan for equitable distribution and to distribute funds for drought relief and recovery as Congress intended.**

As you know, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 into law on December 29, 2022. That law states, *"For an additional amount for "Office of the Secretary" \$3,741,715,000, to remain available until expended, for necessary expenses related to losses of revenue, quality or production losses of crops, trees, bushes, and vines, as a consequence of droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze, including a polar vortex, smoke exposure, and excessive moisture occurring in calendar year 2022. . ."* and *"...the Secretary shall use up to \$494,500,000 to provide assistance to producers of livestock. . .for losses incurred during calendar year 2022 due to drought or wildfires."* To date, no distribution plan has been announced and none of the funds from P.L. 117-328 have been distributed, leaving much of the country's agricultural producers without Congressionally intended resources and support during times of record-breaking drought.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Integrated Drought Information System, nearly 35% of the U.S. and nearly 260 million acres of U.S. crops in 26 states are experiencing drought conditions.<sup>1</sup> The monthly outlook is even more dire, forecasting that severe to exceptional drought will persist in at least 23 states and develop in at least two more.<sup>2</sup> In Kansas, the leading beef producing state, 85% of cattle are located in drought areas, with more than 60% located in exceptional drought areas (D4) and 12% in extreme drought areas (D3).<sup>3</sup> In California, severe drought continues as statewide

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Integrated Drought Information System, *National Drought Status*, <https://www.drought.gov/national>. Accessed on February 13, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *U.S. Drought Monitor*, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/AgInDrought.pdf>. Accessed February 24, 2023.

irrigated crops dropped by nearly 10% to 752,000 acres in 2022, and the statewide direct economic impact from crop revenue losses totaled \$1.7 billion in 2022.<sup>4</sup> In Texas, the number one cotton producing state, historic drought conditions in 2022 led to the abandonment of nearly 50% of total cotton acres statewide, with 72% of the acres in the High Plains region unable to be harvested – having devastating effects throughout the cotton supply chain.<sup>5</sup> In Washington State, wheat production fell nearly 50%, from 166 million bushels in 2020 to just 87 million bushels in 2021 because of drought and record-breaking heat.<sup>6</sup>

Disasters like this drought have illustrated that the Department should encourage the use of traditional farm safety net programs like crop insurance in their emergency relief distribution instead of relying on ad hoc disaster assistance alone.

It is with these concerns in mind that we ask for your detailed responses to the following questions by **March 22, 2023**:

1. How does the Department plan to distribute funds available to farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers under P.L. 117-328?
2. Will the Department rely on an existing model for distribution such as Phase I or Phase II of the Emergency Relief Program?
3. When does the Department plan to distribute funds or announce enrollment for the funds available to farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers under P.L. 117-328?
4. How will the Department involve Congress in any new plan for distribution of funds and report to Congress on availability and distribution of funds?

**Again, we urge you to swiftly develop a plan for equitable distribution and to distribute funds for drought relief and recovery as Congress intended.** The congressionally appropriated funds remain critical for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers to continue to feed, fuel, and clothe our country and world, even in the face of disaster and drought.

Sincerely,



Tracey Mann  
Member of Congress



Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



Mark Alford  
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier  
Member of Congress



Ronny Jackson  
Member of Congress



Yadira Caraveo  
Member of Congress

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<sup>4</sup> J. Medellín-Azuara et. al., Economic impacts of the 2020-2022 Drought on California Agriculture (2022) A report for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, (University of California, Merced), 4, [https://wsn.ucmerced.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Economic\\_Impact\\_CA\\_Drought\\_V02-1.pdf](https://wsn.ucmerced.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Economic_Impact_CA_Drought_V02-1.pdf). Accessed February 21, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, Crop Acreage Data, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/efoia/electronic-reading-room/frequently-requested-information/crop-acreage-data/index>. Accessed February 24, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Small Grains 2021 Summary – September 2021, [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays\\_Reports/reports/smgr0921.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/smgr0921.pdf). Accessed February 23, 2023.

